

# The Freemason in the Rye

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J D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is a work with many mysteries attached to it: perhaps the least of which is that, though it is both incoherent and morally destructive, it has been forced-fed by America's public school system to America's adolescents for sixty years. A mystery more often cited by the public press, however, has been the book's association with assassinations.

In fact, [among the assassins purportedly in possession of \*Catcher in the Rye\* were three of the most famous in history](#). Mark David Chapman, after he had shot and killed John Lennon, calmly opened his copy of *Catcher in the Rye* and proceeded to read it before being apprehended. John Hinckley was also carrying the book while attempting to kill Ronald Reagan. It is alleged that Lee Harvey Oswald had a copy in his apartment and that it was one of his favorite books, though this is disputed.



The strange cluster of individuals in possession of the book at the time they assassinated a famous person have led some to speculate that the book is somehow a trigger for 'mind controlled' subjects, as was the case for the assassin who was depicted in the book and film 'The Manchurian Candidate'.

In this work I will decode the symbolic framework of the *Catcher in the Rye* and this will explain why the assassins were alleged to have possessed it. The book was not necessarily a trigger for the murders, but it was certainly a warning to those who understood its real meaning. The warning was to maintain silence about what Salinger described as a "secret fraternity".

## Studying 'the Egyptians' for 28 days

The *Catcher in the Rye* describes many 'secrets'. For example, the book begins with the central character, Holden Caulfield, noting "my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father."

The central secret of *The Catcher in the Rye* is the identity of the "secret fraternity" that Holden Caulfield was a member of:

*"And they had this goddam secret fraternity that I was too yellow not to join."*

To learn the identity of the "secret fraternity", a reader must recognize that Salinger is

using the cryptic style of typology used to create the Gospels and the Shakespearean literature. *Catcher in the Rye* is especially difficult to decode because the framework much of it is based upon – the initiation rites of the Freemasons – are often secret and may not be uniform from one lodge to another.

However, many descriptions of the rites have been published, and it is obvious when comparing the ‘type scenes’ in *Catcher* to these descriptions that Salinger is using a framework connected to them.

The first typological clue Salinger provides to the identity of the ‘secret society’ is given in a scene at the beginning of the book where Caulfield is discussing his grade with his history teacher, Mr. Spencer, who states that Caulfield “studied the Egyptians” for twenty-eight days and then failed a test about the subject.

*“We studied the Egyptians from November 4th to December 2nd,” he said. “You chose to write about them for the optional essay question. Would you care to hear what you had to say?”*

*“No, sir, not very much,” I said.*

While the symbolism is oblique, once a reader adopts the correct interpretive framework, the meaning is transparent. The “secret fraternity” is the Freemasons, and the [twenty-eight days](#) spent studying the Egyptians refers to the period of studying a candidate must spend between the time of his initiation as an “Entered Apprentice”, to the time he takes the exam to become a second degree Mason.

Salinger is using the concept of the ‘Egyptians’ to represent the Freemasons because the group claims lineage from the ancient Egyptians and uses their symbols in its rites. In other words, as with the Gospels and the works of Shakespeare, underneath the book’s surface narration there lies a symbolic path to a completely different storyline.

Thus, on its surface, *Catcher in the Rye* appears to center on the internal life of Holden Caulfield, a neurotic seventeen year old who is expelled from his prep school. However, its symbolic meaning reveals a process whereby Caulfield, having failed to progress through Freemasonry’s ‘levels’ in his first attempt, nevertheless obtains the knowledge needed to join the “secret fraternity” and learn its deepest secret.

The kind of Freemasonry Salinger described was not the beneficial stereotype that does charitable works, but rather an organization with a sinister agenda. At the book’s conclusion, Holden Caulfield has become a ‘Master Mason’ and is permitted to enter the ‘Holy of Holies’ to learn the ultimate secret of the Freemasons – which, apparently, is that the “Sons of Light” as Robert Burns describes Freemasonry, has sworn to implement an ‘Apocalypse’ on all non-Masons and to kill everyone who exposes the organization’s plans.

Anyone who reads this analysis and finds it credible has a responsibility to determine exactly who the ‘Sons of Light’ Burns describes are and to learn the nature of the oaths

they swear at their highest levels.

## **Learning the rules**

In the book a series of individuals give Caulfield advice. While the advice is cryptic, it is the information that a Freemason needs to rise through the organization's levels to its secret knowledge,

In his session with Spencer, Caulfield recalls the advice he received from his headmaster, Dr. Thurmer, who pointed out that life is a game with 'rules'. Holden states that it is a game with rules if you are on the correct side, the side with the 'hot shots'. If you don't belong to the correct side then there is no 'game' at all. Central to understanding the book is learning the identity of the 'hot-shots' and the nature of their 'rules'.

On its surface, the passage describes Spencer's disappointment with Holden's inability to understand the truth about the 'Egyptians'. What is symbolically depicted is that Holden failed his second-degree [initiation exam](#) for entry into the Freemasons.

However, in the meeting with Spencer, Holden begins to learn the truth, and hints that he may be moving on to the next level:

*"Do you feel absolutely no concern for your future, boy?"*

*"Oh, I feel some concern for my future, all right. Sure. Sure, I do." I thought about it for a minute. "But not too much, I guess. Not too much, I guess."*

*"You will," old Spencer said. "You will, boy. You will when it's too late."*

*I didn't like hearing him say that. It made me sound dead or something. It was very depressing. "I guess I will," I said."*

The fact that his teacher makes Holden feel dead at this point indicates that Holden has moved on to the [third degree of freemason initiation](#), in which the candidate is made to imitate the death of Hiram Abiff during his initiation.

## **Bulls, Ducks and Fishes**

Holden finishes his meeting with Spencer by "shooting the bull." Within the cryptic writing style of the Gospels that Salinger is adopting, the repetition of a concept is a key to alert the reader that a deeper level lies beneath. What Holden is really learning here is that a bull must be shot, as happens at the end of the story.

*Well, you could see he really felt pretty lousy about flunking me. So I shot the bull for a while. I told him I was a real moron, and all that stuff. I told him how I would've done exactly the same thing if I'd been in his place, and how most people didn't appreciate how tough it is being a teacher. That kind of stuff. The old bull.*

While 'shooting the bull', Holden opens a motif that continues throughout the book

concerning “ducks and fishes”, by stating that he is confused about the nature of ducks. An obvious allegorical interpretation is that the ducks represent the outsiders, or the ones who have strayed from the path; while the fishes represent the chosen ones who abide in the truth of Freemasonry, which in the opinion of the secret fraternity is permanent. The passage prefigures the book’s conclusion, where the truth about the ducks is understood, and a ‘bull’ is shot.

Notice below how often the phrase ‘shoot the bull’ is used below, though it is seldom used in the rest of the book:

*The funny thing is, though, I was sort of thinking of something else while I shot the bull. I live in New York, and I was thinking about the lagoon in Central Park, down near Central Park South. I was wondering if it would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was, where did the ducks go. I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they just flew away.*

*I’m lucky, though. I mean I could shoot the old bull to old Spencer and think about those ducks at the same time. It’s funny. You don’t have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher. All of a sudden, though, he interrupted me while I was shooting the bull. He was always interrupting you.”*

Later in the story Caulfield will learn about the ‘ducks’ and the ‘fish’ by asking a cab driver named Horwitz, the name of a famous rabbinical family. While Caulfield says that the ducks are not permanent, Horwitz believes that ‘Mother Nature’ takes care of the fish, so they are permanent. Since the ducks occur in the same context as the “bull” or Taurus, it follows that they represent Flavian Christianity.

*He turned all the way around again, and said, “The fish don’t go no place. They stay right where they are, the fish. Right in the goddam lake.”*

*“The fish—that’s different. The fish is different. I’m talking about the ducks,” I said.*

*“What’s different about it? Nothin’s different about it,” Horwitz said. Everything he said, he sounded sore about something. “It’s tougher for the fish, the winter and all, than it is for the ducks, for Chrissake. Use your head, for Chrissake.”*

*I didn’t say anything for about a minute. Then I said, “All right. What do they do, the fish and all, when that whole little lake’s a solid block of ice, people skating on it and all?”*

*Old Horwitz turned around again. “What the hellaya mean what do they do?” he yelled at me. “They stay right where they are, for Chrissake.”*

*“They can’t just ignore the ice. They can’t just ignore it.”*

*“Who’s ignoring it? Nobody’s ignoring it!” Horwitz said. He got so damn excited and all, I was afraid he was going to drive the cab right into a lamppost or something. “They live right in the goddam ice. It’s their nature, for Chrissake. They get frozen right in one*

*position for the whole winter."*

*"Yeah? What do they eat, then? I mean if they're frozen solid, they can't swim around looking for food and all."*

*"Their bodies, for Chrissake—what's a matter with ya? Their bodies take in nutrition and all, right through the goddam seaweed and crap that's in the ice. They got their pores open the whole time. That's their nature, for Chrissake. See what I mean?" He turned way the hell around again to look at me.*

*[....]*

*When I got out in front of Ernie's and paid the fare, old Horwitz brought up the fish again. He certainly had it on his mind. "Listen," he said. "If you was a fish, Mother Nature'd take care of you, wouldn't she? Right? You don't think them fish just die when it gets to be winter, do ya?"*

*"No, but—"*

*"You're goddam right they don't," Horwitz said, and drove off like a bat out of hell. He was about the touchiest guy I ever met. Everything you said made him sore.*

## **Sleeping in Eli's Bed**

The next example of how Salinger weaves aspects of Freemason Initiation into *Catcher in the Rye* is his story depicting 'Ely's bed' — a concept he repeats three times.

*That got him excited. "He did? No kidding? He did?"*

*I told him I was only kidding, and then I went over and laid down on Ely's bed. Boy, did I feel rotten. I felt so damn lonesome.*

*"This room stinks," I said. "I can smell your socks from way over here. Don'tcha ever send them to the laundry?"*

*"If you don't like it, you know what you can do," Ackley said. What a witty guy.*

*"How 'bout turning off the goddam light?"*

*I didn't turn it off right away, though. I just kept laying there on Ely's bed, thinking about Jane and all. It just drove me stark staring mad when I thought about her and Stradlater parked somewhere in that fat-assed Ed Banky's car. Every time I thought about it, I felt like jumping out the window. The thing is, you didn't know Stradlater. I knew him. Most guys at Pencey just talked about having sexual intercourse with girls all the time—like Ackley, for instance—but old Stradlater really did it. I was personally acquainted with at least two girls he gave the time to. That's the truth.*

*"Tell me the story of your fascinating life, Ackley kid," I said.*

*“How ’bout turning off the goddam light? I gotta get up for Mass in the morning.” I got up and turned it off, if it made him happy. Then I laid down on Ely’s bed again.*

*“What’re ya gonna do—sleep in Ely’s bed?” Ackley said. He was the perfect host, boy.*

Salinger is describing the ‘Introduction to the Prophetical Office’, a rite of Freemasonry in which someone is described lying down in Eli’s bed and the light being turned off. This is part of the ritual of the “Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch”. (The scriptural quote is 1 Samuel 3.)

*In the introduction to the Prophetical Office the following passage is read: “And the child Samuel administered to the Lord before Eli. And it came to pass at that time when Eli was laid down in his place and his eyes began to wax dim that he could not see because the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord. And Samuel was laid down to sleep and the Lord called Samuel and he answered “Here I am for thou called me” And He said “Lie down again for I called not.”* ([\*Freemason Manual, Jeremiah How, Ch. 16, p. 180.\*](#))

## **The ‘people-shooting hat’**

Salinger then brings up the most important image in the book, his ‘people-shooting hat’. As is often the case in cryptic writing, the literal but unexpected meaning is the correct one. In other words, Holden will wear the hat while he is (figuratively) shooting people at the book’s conclusion.

*He took another look at my hat while he was cleaning them. “Up home we wear a hat like that to shoot deer in, for Chrissake,” he said. “That’s a deer shooting hat.”*

*“Like hell it is.” I took it off and looked at it. I sort of closed one eye, like I was taking aim at it. “This is a people shooting hat,” I said. “I shoot people in this hat.”*

Notice that Salinger invokes the concept “one eye” in the passage. This reminds us of the ‘one eye’ of Providence, or the ancient Egyptian Eye of Horus; or, if you prefer, the all-seeing ‘eye of God’ floating at the peak of the unfinished pyramid on the US dollar bill. It is, of course, a renowned symbol of Freemasonry. For Salinger, it is an eyeball taking aim down the barrel of a rifle, an evil eye, a harbinger of death and genocide.

## **Re-enacting the death of Hiram Abiff**

Salinger then goes on to describe a ‘blind person who seeks the hand of a sighted one.’ This is another representation of the Freemason third degree initiation ritual wherein the initiate is blindfolded, holds the hand of his mentors, and then is knocked to the ground in imitation of the death of Hiram Abiff.

*I slid way the hell down in my chair and watched old Ackley making himself at home. I was feeling sort of tired from the trip to New York and all, and I started yawning. Then I*

*started horsing around a little bit. Sometimes I horse around quite a lot, just to keep from getting bored. What I did was, I pulled the old peak of my hunting hat around to the front, then pulled it way down over my eyes. That way, I couldn't see a goddam thing. "I think I'm going blind," I said in this very hoarse voice. "Mother darling, everything's getting so dark in here."*

*"You're nuts. I swear to God," Ackley said.*

*"Mother darling, give me your hand, Why won't you give me your hand?"*

*"For Chrissake, grow up."*

*I started groping around in front of me, like a blind guy, but without getting up or anything. I kept saying, "Mother darling, why won't you give me your hand?" I was only horsing around, naturally. That stuff gives me a bang sometimes. Besides, I know it annoyed hell out of old Ackley. He always brought out the old sadist in me. I was pretty sadistic with him quite often. Finally, I quit, though. I pulled the peak around to the back again, and relaxed."*

*Then he really let one go at me, and the next thing I knew I was on the goddam floor again. I don't remember if he knocked me out or not, but I don't think so. It's pretty hard to knock a guy out, except in the goddam movies. But my nose was bleeding all over the place. When I looked up old Stradlater was standing practically right on top of me. He had his goddam toilet kit under his arm. "Why the hell don'tcha shut up when I tellya to?"*

## **Bernice doesn't like that type language**

In another fascinating passage, Salinger describes the language style of the Oligarchs – typology, or as he playfully terms it “type language”. Caulfield dances with ‘three witches’ in the ‘Lavender Room’. ‘Royal Purple’ is a popular variety of lavender, so this tells us that the three witches represent royalty. Caulfield describes “Bernice” as a “real queen”, indicating that she is a ‘type’ of Bernice the granddaughter of Herod the Great who helped create the ‘type language’ in the Gospels. The other two ‘witches’ are pagan goddesses: dancing with Marty is said to be like “dragging the Statue of Liberty around the floor”. That is, the famous gigantic idol of the Goddess known as Libertas (and also known as Aphrodite, Ishtar, Astarte, Isis or Venus), designed by the masonic sculptor Frederic Bartoldi. Marty’s sister Laverne seems to be another obscure Latin goddess, Lavarina, the patron saint of thieves and the underworld.

The scene may indicate that understanding the typology in the Gospels is a ‘level’ of Freemasonry. Bernice’s connection to Christianity will play a central role in the book’s conclusion.

Bernice complains that Caulfield is using ‘type language’ after Caulfield paints himself as a ‘type’ of Jesus, by claiming that he is twelve years old and is big for his age. This is based upon Jesus’ experience in the Temple as a child, where he revealed his messianic wisdom to the priests. Caulfield’s name is part of this theme, as a child born inside of an

intact amniotic sac is said to be born 'en caul', which is a very rare indication of a special individual. Caulfield also has white hair and a great height showing that he has advanced beyond his age.

*I began giving the three witches at the next table the eye again. That is, the blonde one. The other two were strictly from hunger...*

*"Hey—how old are you, anyhow?"*

*That annoyed me, for some reason. "Oh, Christ. Don't spoil it," I said. "I'm twelve, for Chrissake. I'm big for my age."*

*"Listen. I toleja about that. I don't like that type language," she said. "If you're gonna use that type language, I can go sit down with my girl friends, you know."*

### **The lunatic that cut himself with stones**

Later that night, as he is trying to go to sleep, Caulfield also shows his awareness of the typology in the Gospels with his reference to the story of the Demon of Gadara, from Mark 5:1-20 (also found in Luke 8:26-39). He understands that the 'lunatic' who "cut himself with stones" in the Gospels was a 'stone-cutter' or 'Tekton', the Greek word for a stonemason, architect or Freemason.

*I'm sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible. Take the Disciples, for instance. They annoy the hell out of me, if you want to know the truth. They were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting Him down. I like almost anybody in the Bible better than the Disciples. If you want to know the truth, the guy I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus, was that lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones. I like him ten times as much as the Disciples, that poor bastard.*

In Caesar's Messiah the typology concerning the "lunatic" who cut himself with stones is explained as follows:

*I noticed that at the conclusion of the siege of Jerusalem in Wars of the Jews, Simon and John both take refuge in subterranean caverns beneath Jerusalem. Eventually they are forced by starvation to come out of these "tombs" and surrender to the Romans. This event struck me as a parallel to the description of the demon-possessed men "coming out of the tombs" in the New Testament.*

*The passage in Wars of the Jews that describes these caverns confirms that they are indeed "tombs."*

*. . . the Romans slew some of them, some they carried captives, and others they made a search for underground, and when they found where they were, they broke up the ground and slew all they met with.*



*There were also found slain there above two thousand persons, partly by their own hands, and partly by one another, but chiefly destroyed by the famine;*

*but then the ill savor of the dead bodies was most offensive to those that lighted upon them, insomuch that some were obliged to get away immediately . . .*

*As I have mentioned, the demon-possessed man at Gadara is described as “cutting himself with stones.” Cutting oneself with “stones” is, of course, unusual—a stone is not a tool someone would normally use to cut with. What is the author of this passage actually referring to? I realized that if the demoniacs of Gadara are intended to satirize the rebel leaders, then there was a satiric answer to this question.*

*The phrase in the New Testament where the demoniac is “in the tombs . . . cutting himself with stones” shares a darkly humorous relationship with the passage in Wars of the Jews that describes the “tombs” that John and Simon take refuge in. The scornful joke comes from the unanswered question in Mark 5:5 – this question being, what does one call someone who cuts himself with stones? In a passage in Wars of the Jews relating to the rebel leader’s hiding in the “tombs,” one can see an ironic answer. Someone who cuts himself with stones is “stone-cut,” and can therefore mockingly be called a “stone-cutter.”*

*This Simon, during the siege of Jerusalem, was in the upper city; but when the Roman army was gotten within the walls, and were laying the city waste, he then took the most faithful of his friends with him, and among them some that were stonecutters, with those iron tools which belonged to their occupation.*

If, indeed, Salinger was aware of this entire typological scenario, then Caulfield was expressing that he felt the most sympathy and identification with Simon and John, the actual heroes of the Jewish rebel movement. On the other hand, Caulfield may have simply been expressing an ironic respect for the Biblical underdog.

The next day, while speaking with two nuns he meets on the train, Caulfield also shows awareness of the Shakespearian literature in that he picks out Mercutio, the most blameless character in the play, as his favorite. Mercutio’s death, however, provoked an intensification of the discord between the two Gentile families, the Montagues and Capulets.

*“Well, I’m not too crazy about Romeo and Juliet,” I said. “I mean I like them, but—I don’t know. They get pretty annoying sometimes. I mean I felt much sorrier when old Mercutio got killed than when Romeo and Juliet did. The think is, I never liked Romeo too much after Mercutio gets stabbed by that other man—Juliet’s cousin—what’s his name?”*

*“Tybalt.”*

*“That’s right. Tybalt,” I said—I always forget that guy’s name. “It was Romeo’s fault. I mean I liked him the best in the play, old Mercutio. I don’t know. All those Montagues and Capulets, they’re all right—especially Juliet—but Mercutio, he was—it’s hard to*

*explain. He was very smart and entertaining and all. The thing is, it drives me crazy if somebody gets killed— especially somebody very smart and entertaining and all— and it's somebody else's fault. Romeo and Juliet, at least it was their own fault."*

## **The Freemason in the Rye**

The most important puzzle to solve to understand the real meaning of *Catcher in the Rye* is Caulfield's 'misunderstanding' of the freemason Robert Burns' poem: 'Coming through the Rye'. Caulfield overhears a child singing the song.

Here is one version of Burns poem:

"Coming thro' the Rye" (1796)

*Coming thro' the rye, poor body,  
Coming thro' the rye,  
She draiglet a' her petticoatie  
Coming thro' the rye.*

*O, Jenny's a' wat, poor body;  
Jenny's seldom dry;  
She draiglet a' her petticoatie  
Coming thro' the rye.*

*Gin a body meet a body  
Coming thro' the rye,  
Gin a body kiss a body—  
Need a body cry?*

*Gin a body meet a body  
Coming thro' the glen,  
Gin a body kiss a body—  
Need the warld ken?*

Even in the above G-rated version, the poem is clearly discussing a sexual encounter out in the tall grass. Another, less well-known version spells it out, in case anyone misses the point.

Here is the 'whorehouse' version of the song.

*O gin a body meet a body,  
Comin' throu the rye:  
Gin a body fuck a body,  
Need a body cry.*

*Comin' thro' the rye, my jo,  
An' coming' thro' the rye;  
She fand a staun o' staunin' graith,*

*Comin' thro' the rye.*

*Gin a body meet a body,  
Comin' thro' the glen;  
Gin a body fuck a body,  
Need the world ken.*

*Gin a body meet a body,  
Comin' thro' the grain;  
Gin a body fuck a body,  
Cunt's a body's ain.*

*Gin a body meet a body,  
By a body's sel,  
What na body fucks a body,  
Wad a body tell.*

*Mony a body meets a body,  
They dare na weel avow;  
Mony a body fucks a body,  
Ye wadna think its true.*

In order to understand which version the child was singing requires recognizing the image given in the passage directly preceding the one in which the child is singing Burn's song.

*There was this record I wanted to get for Phoebe, called "Little Shirley Beans." It was a very hard record to get. It was about a little kid that wouldn't go out of the house because two of her front teeth were out and she was ashamed to. I heard it at Pencey. A boy that lived on the next floor had it, and I tried to buy it off him because I knew it would knock old Phoebe out, but he wouldn't sell it. It was a very old, terrific record that this colored girl singer, Estelle Fletcher, made about twenty years ago. She sings it very Dixieland and whorehouse, and it doesn't sound at all mushy.*

Notice that the song 'Little Shirley Beans' is for children, but that the singer gives a "whorehouse" version of the song. This is the framework the author wishes a reader to use in the next paragraph; where we encounter the description of the mysterious 'catcher' in the rye. Holden believes he overhears a child singing, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." This lyric does not occur in either version of the Burns song; the phrase is either "when a body meet a body" or "when a body fuck a body". Holden understands the words of the song in a way they were never written. The alert reader will recognize that the child is singing – as in the paragraph above – the "whorehouse" version of the song, which Caulfield will understand at the book's end.

Where Caulfield heard 'catch', the child must have been singing 'fuck'. Salinger's 'real' title is therefore 'Fucker in the Rye' and this describes Caulfield's 'revelation' in the Freemason's holy of holies given below. In other words, that the deepest secret of Freemasonry is "fuck you", which appears to be Apocalypse to non-Freemasons and

death to members that are traitors to the organization.

## **Walking the straight line**

Notice that the child who is singing the song is walking in a straight line. This is something that children seldom do, but is a requirement within Freemason lodges; which reveals the identity of the 'church' the family has just left.

*It wasn't as cold as it was the day before, but the sun still wasn't out, and it wasn't too nice for walking. But there was one nice thing. This family that you could tell just came out of some church were walking right in front of me—a father, a mother, and a little kid about six years old. They looked sort of poor. The father had on one of those pearl-gray hats that poor guys wear a lot when they want to look sharp. He and his wife were just walking along, talking, not paying any attention to their kid. The kid was swell. He was walking in the street, instead of on the sidewalk, but right next to the curb. He was making out like he was walking a very straight line, the way kids do, and the whole time he kept singing and humming. I got up closer so I could hear what he was singing. He was singing that song, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." He had a pretty little voice, too. He was just singing for the hell of it, you could tell. The cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place, his parents paid no attention to him, and he kept on walking next to the curb and singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." It made me feel better. It made me feel not so depressed any more.*

Following his encounter with the singing child, Caulfield comes to a museum which he cannot enter. This is because the museum represents a Freemason temple with its holy of holies. Caulfield cannot go in because he does not yet have the correct information that he would need to possess the 'level' that permits a Freemason to learn its deepest secret. This information will come after his encounter with Antolini.

*Then a funny thing happened. When I got to the museum, all of a sudden I wouldn't have gone inside for a million bucks. It just didn't appeal to me—and here I'd walked through the whole goddam park and looked forward to it and all. If Phoebe'd been there, I probably would have, but she wasn't. So all I did, in front of the museum, was get a cab and go down to the Biltmore.*

## **Albert Pike thinks he's hot stuff**

Salinger makes a digression to create a cryptic homage to Albert Pike, the most infamous American freemason, who he describes as someone who was "conceited". This is probably depicting Pike's delineation between the vast intellect of insider Freemasons and those who not enter the inner circle. I suspect that this cryptic story about 'Al Pike' indicates a level of Freemasonry in which its history and the intellectual status of those permitted to rise to its higher levels is revealed.

[Pike wrote:](#)

*It should be noted, that the great majority of Masons are far from being "initiated" and*

*“are grovelling in Egyptian darkness” (Chr., 1878, II, 28). “The Masonry of the higher degrees,” says Pike [4], I, 311), “teaches the great truths of intellectual science; but as to these, even as to the rudiments and first principles, Blue Masonry is absolutely dumb. Its dramas seem intended to teach the resurrection of the body.” “The pretended possession of mysterious secrets has enabled Blue Masonry to number its initiates by tens of thousands. Never were any pretenses to the possession of mysterious knowledge so baseless and so absurd as those of the Blue and Royal Arch Chapter Degrees” (ibid., IV, 388 sq.).*

Salinger’s satirical depiction of Pike rings true:

*She was dating this terrible guy, Al Pike, that went to Choate. I didn’t know him too well, but he was always hanging around the swimming pool. He wore those white Lastex kind of swimming trunks, and he was always going off the high dive. He did the same lousy old half gainer all day long. It was the only dive he could do, but he thought he was very hot stuff. All muscles and no brains. Anyway, that’s who Jane dated that night. I couldn’t understand it. I swear I couldn’t. After we started going around together, I asked her how come she could date a showoff bastard like Al Pike. Jane said he wasn’t a show-off. She said he had an inferiority complex. She acted like she felt sorry for him or something, and she wasn’t just putting it on. She meant it. It’s a funny thing about girls. Every time you mention some guy that’s strictly a bastard—very mean, or very conceited and all—and when you mention it to the girl, she’ll tell you he has an inferiority complex. Maybe he has, but that still doesn’t keep him from being a bastard, in my opinion.*

## **Seeking the light from Old Luce**

Caulfield meets with a Carl Luce or ‘light’. ‘Light’ informs him that there are “patterns” to one mind that need to be understood to mature.

*So what I did finally, I gave old Carl Luce a buzz. He graduated from the Whooton School after I left. He was about three years older than I was, and I didn’t like him too much, but he was one of these very intellectual guys— he had the highest I.Q. of any boy at Whooton—and I thought he might want to have dinner with me somewhere and have a slightly intellectual conversation. He was very enlightening sometimes. So I gave him a buzz. He went to Columbia now, but he lived on 65th Street and all, and I knew he’d be home. When I got him on the phone, he said he couldn’t make it for dinner but that he’d meet me for a drink at ten o’clock at the Wicker Bar, on 54th. I think he was pretty surprised to hear from me. I once called him a fat-assed phony.*

*Finally old Luce showed up.*

*Old Luce. What a guy. He was supposed to be my Student Adviser when I was at Whooton. The only thing he ever did, though, was give these sex talks and all, late at night when there was a bunch of guys in his room. He knew quite a bit about sex, especially perverts and all.*

[...]

*"Maybe I'll go to China. My sex life is lousy," I said.*

*"Naturally. Your mind is immature."*

*"It is. It really is. I know it," I said. "You know what the trouble with me is? I can never get really sexy—I mean really sexy—with a girl I don't like a lot. I mean I have to like her a lot. If I don't, I sort of lose my goddam desire for her and all. Boy, it really screws up my sex life something awful. My sex life stinks."*

*"Naturally it does, for God's sake. I told you the last time I saw you what you need."*

*"You mean to go to a psychoanalyst and all?" I said. That's what he'd told me I ought to do. His father was a psychoanalyst and all.*

*"It's up to you, for God's sake. It's none of my goddam business what you do with your life."*

*I didn't say anything for a while. I was thinking.*

*"Supposing I went to your father and had him psychoanalyze me and all," I said. "What would he do to me? I mean what would he do to me?"*

*"He wouldn't do a goddam thing to you. He'd simply talk to you, and you'd talk to him, for God's sake. For one thing, he'd help you to recognize the patterns of your mind."*

*"The what?"*

*"The patterns of your mind. Your mind runs in— Listen. I'm not giving an elementary course in psychoanalysis. If you're interested, call him up and make an appointment. If you're not, don't. I couldn't care less, frankly."*

*I put my hand on his shoulder. Boy, he amused me. "You're a real friendly bastard," I told him. "You know that?"*

*He was looking at his wrist watch. "I have to tear," he said, and stood up. "Nice seeing you." He got the bartender and told him to bring him his check.*

*"Hey," I said, just before he beat it. "Did your father ever psychoanalyze you?" "Me? Why do you ask?"*

*"No reason. Did he, though? Has he?"*

*"Not exactly. He's helped me to adjust myself to a certain extent, but an extensive analysis hasn't been necessary. Why do you ask?"*

*"No reason. I was just wondering."*

*Caulfield again reveals a messianic aspect to his identity by showing a woman his grey*

hair and telling her he was 42 a number divided by seven.

*I showed her my goddam gray hair and told her I was forty-two—I was only horsing around, naturally.*

Caulfield sees that there are no ‘ducks’ left in Central Park. This foresees the story’s ending when he shoots all the ‘ducks’.

*I didn’t see any ducks around. I walked all around the whole damn lake—I damn near fell in once, in fact- -but I didn’t see a single duck. I thought maybe if there were any around, they might be asleep or something near the edge of the water, near the grass and all. That’s how I nearly fell in. But I couldn’t find any.*

### **A message for Bernice**

Throughout his adventures, Caulfield often ominously remarks that something ‘kills’ him. After his walk in Central Park, the fear of death crystallizes for Holding, who decides to go home and see his sister Phoebe before death overtakes him. Caulfield meets with his sister – whose name means ‘radiant, bright, prophetic’. He sees her notebook has some cryptic writing on it. The writing symbolically depicts the Freemason’s understanding of the book of Revelation.

Phoebe’s writing indicates that she has something important to tell “Bernice”, who was mentioned earlier in *Catcher* as the blonde dance room ‘witch’ who objected to Caulfield’s self-description as a type of Jesus. The message is “Shirley you said you were sagittarius but your only taurus”.

That is, ‘Shirley’ (a pun on ‘Surely’), the founders of Christianity claimed to be Sagittarius – often identified as the white horse of Revelation 6:2 representing Jesus (or perhaps ‘conquest’ as a harbinger of the apocalypse), but which I have shown (in *Shakespeare’s Secret Messiah*) is Archippus, the symbol of the Roman emperor Domitian. However, they were only Taurus or bull.

Phoebe is interpreting the conclusion to the Book of Revelation as disclosing that the Roman Imperial invention, Christianity, is only bull (that is, bull shit) and is going to be shot or brought to an end.

*the arithmetic was a geography, and the book under the geography was a speller. She’s very good in spelling. She’s very good in all her subjects, but she’s best in spelling. Then, under the speller, there were a bunch of notebooks. She has about five thousand notebooks. You never saw a kid with so many notebooks. I opened the one on top and looked at the first page. It had on it:*

*Bernice meet me at recess I have something very very important to tell you.*

*That was all there was on that page. The next one had on it:*

*Why has south eastern Alaska so many caning factories? Because theres so much salmon*

*Why has it valuable forests?*

*because it has the right climate.*

*What has our government done to make life easier for the alaskan eskimos? look it up for tomorrow!!!*

*Phoebe Weatherfield Caulfield*

*Phoebe Weatherfield Caulfield Phoebe Weatherfield Caulfield Phoebe W. Caulfield*

*Phoebe Weatherfield Caulfield, Esq. Please pass to Shirley!!!!*

*Shirley you said you were sagitarius but your only taurus bring your skates when you come over to my house*

## **Daddy is going to kill you, Holden Caulfield**

Phoebe is horrified when she realizes that Holden has come home early, which means he has been expelled from school. She hits him with her fist, repeatedly yells “Daddy is going to kill you!” and then starts crying into her pillow. Holden tells her not to worry; he’s going to go get a job at a ranch in Colorado. She demands to know what has gone wrong: Holden says it’s a million reasons, but especially their snobbery and their “goddam secret fraternity”:

*Then all of a sudden, she said, “Oh, why did you do it?” She meant why did I get the ax again. It made me sort of sad, the way she said it.*

*“Oh, God, Phoebe, don’t ask me. I’m sick of everybody asking me that,” I said. “A million reasons why. It was one of the worst schools I ever went to. It was full of phonies. And mean guys. You never saw so many mean guys in your life. For instance, if you were having a bull session in somebody’s room, and somebody wanted to come in, nobody’d let them in if they were some dopey, pimply guy. Everybody was always locking their door when somebody wanted to come in. And they had this goddam secret fraternity that I was too yellow not to join. There was this one pimply, boring guy, Robert Ackley, that wanted to get in. He kept trying to join, and they wouldn’t let him. Just because he was boring and pimply. I don’t even feel like talking about it. It was a stinking school. Take my word.”*

*Old Phoebe didn’t say anything, but she was listening. I could tell by the back of her neck that she was listening. She always listens when you tell her something. And the funny part is she knows, half the time, what the hell you’re talking about. She really does.*

Salinger then describes the messianic – Roman Christian – lineage that the Freemasons will end and that Caulfield will emerge from. In the story “James Castle” is a type of Jesus Christ. Note that the “genealogy” showing the messianic lineage from Castle to



Caulfield at the end of the passage is reversing the absurd messianic lineage given in the Gospels, in which the false Roman messiah emerged from the lineage of the true one.

The names before Castle and Caulfield's – "Cabel, Cabel," – are punning on the word 'cabal', The two 'Cabals' being referenced are Roman Christianity and its replacement 'secret organization', the Freemasons.

The term *cabal* derives from [Cabala](#) (a word that has numerous spelling variations), the [Jewish mystical](#) interpretation of the Hebrew scripture. In [Hebrew](#) it means "reception" or "tradition", denoting the *sod* (secret) level of [Jewish exegesis](#).

*"All right," I said. But the trouble was, I couldn't concentrate. About all I could think of were those two nuns that went around collecting dough in those beatup old straw baskets. Especially the one with the glasses with those iron rims. And this boy I knew at Elkton Hills. There was this one boy at Elkton Hills, named James Castle, that wouldn't take back something he said about this very conceited boy, Phil Stabile. James Castle called him a very conceited guy, and one of Stabile's lousy friends went and squealed on him to Stabile. So Stabile, with about six other dirty bastards, went down to James Castle's room and went in and locked the goddam door and tried to make him take back what he said, but he wouldn't do it. So they started in on him. I won't even tell you what they did to him—it's too repulsive—but he still wouldn't take it back, old James Castle. And you should've seen him. He was a skinny little weak-looking guy, with wrists about as big as pencils. Finally, what he did, instead of taking back what he said, he jumped out the window. I was in the shower and all, and even I could hear him land outside. But I just thought something fell out the window, a radio or a desk or something, not a boy or anything. Then I heard everybody running through the corridor and down the stairs, so I put on my bathrobe and I ran downstairs too, and there was old James Castle laying right on the stone steps and all. He was dead, and his teeth, and blood, were all over the place, and nobody would even go near him. He had on this turtleneck sweater I'd lent him. All they did with the guys that were in the room with him was expel them. They didn't even go to jail.*

*That was about all I could think of, though. Those two nuns I saw at breakfast and this boy James Castle I knew at Elkton Hills. The funny part is, I hardly even know James Castle, if you want to know the truth. He was one of these very quiet guys. He was in my math class, but he was way over on the other side of the room, and he hardly ever got up to recite or go to the blackboard or anything. Some guys in school hardly ever get up to recite or go to the blackboard. I think the only time I ever even had a conversation with him was that time he asked me if he could borrow this turtleneck sweater I had. I damn near dropped dead when he asked me, I was so surprised and all. I remember I was brushing my teeth, in the can, when he asked me. He said his cousin was coming in to take him for a drive and all. I didn't even know he knew I had a turtleneck sweater. All I knew about him was that his name was always right ahead of me at roll call. Cabel, R., Cabel, W., Castle, Caulfield—I can still remember it. If you want to know the truth, I almost didn't lend him my sweater. Just because I didn't know him too well.*

Among the numerous insights pointed out to me by Dr. Jerry Russell that improved my

analysis is the fact that Castle had the misfortune to trigger the ire of the secret fraternity; that is, the “conceited boy”, recalling the description of Al Pike.

James Castle would not renounce his effrontery to Freemasonry, even under torture, which plays off on the silence under torture of the Christ in the Gospels. In other words, Salinger is reversing the events of the Gospels. In his version, the Freemasons execute the false Messiah of Christianity, which prepares the way for the return of the ‘different line’ or ‘Antolini’.

Caulfield then describes his misunderstanding of Burns’ song to his sister. He envisions a future where he attempts to help children who are, for some reason, jumping off a cliff. Phoebe repeats the warning that “Daddy’s going to kill you.” We have already been told that Caulfield’s Daddy has secrets; in other words, that Daddy is a Freemason too. Thus, Phoebe’s concern seems very well founded.

*I wasn’t listening, though. I was thinking about something else—something crazy. “You know what I’d like to be?” I said. “You know what I’d like to be? I mean if I had my goddam choice?”*

*“What? Stop swearing.”*

*“You know that song ‘If a body catch a body comin’ through the rye’? I’d like—” “It’s ‘If a body meet a body coming through the rye!’” old Phoebe said. “It’s a poem. By Robert Burns.”*

*“I know it’s a poem by Robert Burns.”*

*She was right, though. It is “If a body meet a body coming through the rye.” I didn’t know it then, though.*

*“I thought it was ‘If a body catch a body,’” I said. “Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody’s around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I’m standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they’re running and they don’t look where they’re going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That’s all I’d do all day. I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it’s crazy, but that’s the only thing I’d really like to be. I know it’s crazy.”*

*Old Phoebe didn’t say anything for a long time. Then, when she said something, all she said was, “Daddy’s going to kill you.”*

Is Caulfield indulging in a pleasant fantasy of living a life of service after he has left the ‘secret fraternity’? Perhaps, but it seems as if he should know better, and his steady stream of cynical banter hardly lends much credence to the idea that he will suddenly become a Good Samaritan.

## **Gaining entry to the inner sanctum**

Fearing a traumatic encounter with his parents, Caulfield decides to go take one last lesson in the Craft, which will allow him to enter the holy of holies and learn the ultimate secret of Freemasonry. The final lesson is to be given to him by Mr. Antolini. ‘Anto’ ‘lini’ means ‘different line’ and indicates a different messianic lineage than that of the Roman messiah represented by Castle.

*I listened, and I heard something, but it wasn’t much. “Good,” I said. Then I went out in the living room and called up this teacher I had, Mr. Antolini.*

*I made it very snappy on the phone because I was afraid my parents would barge in on me right in the middle of it. They didn’t, though. Mr. Antolini was very nice. He said I could come right over if I wanted to. I think I probably woke he and his wife up, because it took them a helluva long time to answer the phone. The first thing he asked me was if anything was wrong, and I said no. I said I’d flunked out of Pencey, though. I thought I might as well tell him. He said “Good God,” when I said that. He had a good sense of humor and all. He told me to come right over if I felt like it.*

“Good God” – another invocation of Caulfield’s role in the story as a messiah figure. In the next passage Antolini reprises the role of Josephus Bar Matthias/Joseph of Arimathea in the Gospels, carrying the dead body of false Roman messiah, James Castle.

*He was about the best teacher I ever had, Mr. Antolini. He was a pretty young guy, not much older than my brother D.B., and you could kid around with him without losing your respect for him. He was the one that finally picked up that boy that jumped out the window I told you about, James Castle. Old Mr. Antolini felt his pulse and all, and then he took off his coat and put it over James Castle and carried him all the way over to the infirmary. He didn’t even give a damn if his coat got all bloody.*

*What I may do, I may hate them for a little while, like this guy Stradlater I knew at Pencey, and this other boy, Robert Ackley. I hated them once in a while—I admit it—but it doesn’t last too long, is what I mean. After a while, if I didn’t see them, if they didn’t come in the room, or if I didn’t see them in the dining room for a couple of meals, I sort of missed them. I mean I sort of missed them.”*

*Mr. Antolini didn’t say anything for a while. He got up and got another hunk of ice and put it in his drink, then he sat down again. You could tell he was thinking. I kept wishing, though, that he’d continue the conversation in the morning, instead of now, but he was hot. People are mostly hot to have a discussion when you’re not.*

*“All right. Listen to me a minute now . . . I may not word this as memorably as I’d like to, but I’ll write you a letter about it in a day or two. Then you can get it all straight. But listen now, anyway.” He started concentrating again. Then he said, “This fall I think you’re riding for—it’s a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn’t permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement’s designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn’t supply them with. Or they thought their own environment couldn’t supply them with. So they gave up looking. They gave it up*

*before they ever really even got started. You follow me?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Sure?"*

*"Yes."*

*He got up and poured some more booze in his glass. Then he sat down again. He didn't say anything for a long time.*

*"I don't want to scare you," he said, "but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause."*

Antolini could hardly make his threat more clear. If Holden Caulfield quits the 'secret fraternity' he will die for a cause (that is, Christianity) that Antolini believes is worthless. This threat will be repeated at the story's conclusion and is the reason the book is associated with so assassinations.

*He gave me a funny look. "If I write something down for you, will you read it carefully? And keep it?"*

*"Yes. Sure," I said. I did, too. I still have the paper he gave me.*

*He went over to this desk on the other side of the room, and without sitting down wrote something on a piece of paper. Then he came back and sat down with the paper in his hand. "Oddly enough, this wasn't written by a practicing poet. It was written by a psychoanalyst named Wilhelm Stekel. Here's what he—Are you still with me?"*

*"Yes, sure I am."*

The 'advice' Antolini writes down for Caulfield simply describes the fact that from now on he must live 'humbly' for a cause, that is he must live with a secret and without revealing his real purpose.

*"Here's what he said: 'The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.'"*

*He leaned over and handed it to me. I read it right when he gave it to me, and then I thanked him and all and put it in my pocket. It was nice of him to go to all that trouble. It really was. The thing was, though, I didn't feel much like concentrating. Boy, I felt so damn tired all of a sudden.*

*You could tell he wasn't tired at all, though. He was pretty oiled up, for one thing. "I think that one of these days," he said, "you're going to have to find out where you want to go. And then you've got to start going there. But immediately. You can't afford to lose a minute. Not you."*

*I nodded, because he was looking right at me and all, but I wasn't too sure what he was*

*talking about. I was pretty sure I knew, but I wasn't too positive at the time. I was too damn tired.*

*"And I hate to tell you," he said, "but I think that once you have a fair idea where you want to go, your first move will be to apply yourself in school. You'll have to. You're a student—whether the idea appeals to you or not. You're in love with knowledge.*

Antolini describes the oral exams of the Apprentice Freemason – the Oral Comp.

*And I think you'll find, once you get past all the Mr. Vineses and their Oral Comp—"*

*"Mr. Vinsons," I said. He meant all the Mr. Vinsons, not all the Mr. Vineses. I shouldn't have interrupted him, though.*

*"All right—the Mr. Vinsons. Once you get past all the Mr. Vinsons, you're going to start getting closer and closer—that is, if you want to, and if you look for it and wait for it—to the kind of information that will be very, very dear to your heart. Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You're by no means alone on that score, you'll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry." He stopped and took a big drink out of his highball. Then he started again. Boy, he was really hot. I was glad I didn't try to stop him or anything. "I'm not trying to tell you," he said, "that only educated and scholarly men are able to contribute something valuable to the world. It's not so. But I do say that educated and scholarly men, if they're brilliant and creative to begin with—which, unfortunately, is rarely the case—tend to leave infinitely more valuable records behind them than men do who are merely brilliant and creative. They tend to express themselves more clearly, and they usually have a passion for following their thoughts through to the end. And—most important—nine times out of ten they have more humility than the unscholarly thinker. Do you follow me at all?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*He didn't say anything again for quite a while. I don't know if you've ever done it, but it's sort of hard to sit around waiting for somebody to say something when they're thinking and all. It really is. I kept trying not to yawn. It wasn't that I was bored or anything—I wasn't—but I was so damn sleepy all of a sudden.*

Antolini describes the level of intelligence that must be held to pass through to the highest level of Freemasonry. Only the most intelligent are permitted to enter the higher levels.

*"Something else an academic education will do for you. If you go along with it any considerable distance, it'll begin to give you an idea what size mind you have. What it'll fit and, maybe, what it won't. After a while, you'll have an idea what kind of thoughts*

*your particular size mind should be wearing. For one thing, it may save you an extraordinary amount of time trying on ideas that don't suit you, aren't becoming to you. You'll begin to know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly."*

*Then, all of a sudden, I yawned. What a rude bastard, but I couldn't help it!*

*Mr. Antolini just laughed, though. "C'mon," he said, and got up. "We'll fix up the couch for you."*

*I followed him and he went over to this closet and tried to take down some sheets and blankets and stuff that was on the top shelf, but he couldn't do it with this highball glass in his hand. So he drank it and then put the glass down on the floor and then he took the stuff down. I helped him bring it over to the couch. We both made the bed together. He wasn't too hot at it. He didn't tuck anything in very tight. I didn't care, though. I could've slept standing up I was so tired.*

*We were all done making up the couch then. "It's all yours," Mr. Antolini said. "I don't know what the hell you're going to do with those legs of yours."*

*"That's all right. I'm used to short beds," I said. "Thanks a lot, sir. You and Mrs. Antolini really saved my life tonight."*

*"You know where the bathroom is. If there's anything you want, just holler. I'll be in the kitchen for a while--will the light bother you?" "No--heck, no. Thanks a lot."*

*"All right. Good night, handsome."*

*"G'night, sir. Thanks a lot."*

*Finally, Caulfield has the necessary knowledge and Antolini administers the ceremony of the Master Mason.*

*Then something happened. I don't even like to talk about it.*

*I woke up all of a sudden. I don't know what time it was or anything, but I woke up. I felt something on my head, some guy's hand. Boy, it really scared hell out of me. What it was, it was Mr. Antolini's hand. What he was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head. Boy, I'll bet I jumped about a thousand feet.*

*"What the helly doing?" I said.*

*"Nothing! I'm simply sitting here, admiring--"*

*"What're ya doing, anyway?" I said over again. I didn't know what the hell to say--*

*-I mean I was embarrassed as hell.*

*“How ’bout keeping your voice down? I’m simply sitting here–“*

*“I have to go, anyway,” I said–boy, was I nervous! I started putting on my damn pants in the dark. I could hardly get them on I was so damn nervous. I know more damn perverts, at schools and all, than anybody you ever met, and they’re always being pervery when I’m around.*

Now that he has passed the ‘levels’, and received the blessing from Antolini’s hand, Caulfield is finally ready to learn the deepest secret of the Freemasons, which is found within the Holy of Holies, a room inside the Freemason Temple.

As he leaves Antolini’s home, Caulfield is shaken by a repeated curse of ‘Fuck you’. The message is ominous, particularly as it is received as indelible handwriting on the wall, recalling the message that was given to Belshazzar at Daniel 5:26-28: *“... God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it....Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting....Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”*

*While I was walking up the stairs, though, all of a sudden I thought I was going to puke again. Only, I didn’t. I sat down for a second, and then I felt better. But while I was sitting down, I saw something that drove me crazy. Somebody’d written “Fuck you” on the wall. It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they’d wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them–all cockeyed, naturally–what it meant, and how they’d all think about it and maybe even worry about it for a couple of days. I kept wanting to kill whoever’d written it. I figured it was some pervery bum that’d sneaked in the school late at night to take a leak or something and then wrote it on the wall. I kept picturing myself catching him at it, and how I’d smash his head on the stone steps till he was good and goddam dead and bloody. But I knew, too, I wouldn’t have the guts to do it. I knew that. That made me even more depressed. I hardly even had the guts to rub it off the wall with my hand, if you want to know the truth. I was afraid some teacher would catch me rubbing it off and would think I’d written it. But I rubbed it out anyway, finally.*

*I went down by a different staircase, and I saw another “Fuck you” on the wall. I tried to rub it off with my hand again, but this one was scratched on, with a knife or something. It wouldn’t come off. It’s hopeless, anyway. If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn’t rub out even half the “Fuck you” signs in the world. It’s impossible.*

*I looked at the clock in the recess yard, and it was only twenty to twelve, so I had quite a lot of time to kill before I met old Phoebe. But I just walked over to the museum anyway. There wasn’t anyplace else to go. I thought maybe I might stop in a phone booth and give old Jane Gallagher a buzz before I started bumming my way west, but I wasn’t in the mood. For one thing, I wasn’t even sure she was home for vacation yet. So I just went over to the museum, and hung around.*

*While I was waiting around for Phoebe in the museum, right inside the doors and all, these two little kids came up to me and asked me if I knew where the mummies were. The one little kid, the one that asked me, had his pants open. I told him about it. So he buttoned them up right where he was standing talking to me–he didn’t even bother to go*

*behind a post or anything. He killed me. I would've laughed, but I was afraid I'd feel like vomiting again, so I didn't. "Where're the mummies, fella?" the kid said again. "Ya know?"*

*I horsed around with the two of them a little bit. "The mummies? What're they?" I asked the one kid.*

*"You know. The mummies—them dead guys. That get buried in them toons and all."*

*Toons. That killed me. He meant tombs.*

*"How come you two guys aren't in school?" I said.*

*"No school t'day," the kid that did all the talking said. He was lying, sure as I'm alive, the little bastard. I didn't have anything to do, though, till old Phoebe showed up, so I helped them find the place where the mummies were. Boy, I used to know exactly where they were, but I hadn't been in that museum in years.*

[The following is a description of the Holy of Holies that is inside every Freemason Temple:](#)

*"Every student of Jewish antiquities knows and every Freemason who has taken the Third Degree ought to know, what was the peculiar construction, character, and uses of the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holly [sic] of Holies in King Solomon's Temple. Situated in the western end of the Temple, separated from the rest of the building by a heavy curtain, and enclosed on three sides by dead walls without any aperture or window, it contained the sacred Ark of the Covenant, and was secluded and set apart from all intrusion save of the High Priest, who only entered it on certain solemn occasions. As it was the most sacred of the three parts of the Temple, so has it been made symbolic of a Master's Lodge, in which are performed the most sacred rites of initiation in Ancient Craft Freemasonry.*

In the next passage two 'brothers' – experienced Freemasons – accompany Caulfield to the Holy of Holies.

*"You two guys so interested in mummies?" I said. "Yeah."*

*"Can't your friend talk?" I said.*

*"He ain't my friend. He's my brudda."*

*"Can't he talk?" I looked at the one that wasn't doing any talking. "Can't you talk at all?" I asked him.*

*"Yeah," he said. "I don't feel like it."*

*Finally we found the place where the mummies were, and we went in.*



*"You know how the Egyptians buried their dead?" I asked the one kid. "Naa."*

*"Well, you should. It's very interesting. They wrapped their faces up in these cloths that were treated with some secret chemical. That way they could be buried in their tombs for thousands of years and their faces wouldn't rot or anything. Nobody knows how to do it except the Egyptians. Even modern science."*

*To get to where the mummies were, you had to go down this very narrow sort of hall with stones on the side that they'd taken right out of this Pharaoh's tomb and all. It was pretty spooky, and you could tell the two hot-shots I was with weren't enjoying it too much. They stuck close as hell to me, and the one that didn't talk at all practically was holding onto my sleeve. "Let's go," he said to his brother. "I seen 'em awreddy. C'mon, hey." He turned around and beat it.*

*"He's got a yella streak a mile wide," the other one said. "So long!" He beat it too.*

As he leaves the tomb, Caulfield again encounters the secret knowledge – "Fuck You".

*I was the only one left in the tomb then. I sort of liked it, in a way. It was so nice and peaceful. Then, all of a sudden, you'd never guess what I saw on the wall. Another "Fuck you." It was written with a red crayon or something, right under the glass part of the wall, under the stones.*

The "Fuck You" is an oath that is taken to the death – it will be on their gravestones. Notice that there is no place on earth that one can escape this curse, a point I will return to at the conclusion.

*That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any. You may think there is, but once you get there, when you're not looking, somebody'll sneak up and write "Fuck you" right under your nose. Try it sometime. I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it'll say "Holden Caulfield" on it, and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it'll say "Fuck you." I'm positive, in fact.*

Holden passes out, which may be alluding to some state a Mason enters into after the secret knowledge is given; or it may be alluding to the extreme fear of punishment that he is living under.

*After I came out of the place where the mummies were, I had to go to the bathroom. I sort of had diarrhea, if you want to know the truth. I didn't mind the diarrhea part too much, but something else happened. When I was coming out of the can, right before I got to the door, I sort of passed out. I was lucky, though. I mean I could've killed myself when I hit the floor, but all I did was sort of land on my side. it was a funny thing, though. I felt better after I passed out. I really did. My arm sort of hurt, from where I fell, but I didn't feel so damn dizzy any more.*

Meeting again with Phoebe, he finds that she has packed her suitcase and is ready to leave with him. Caulfield begs her to go back home, to no avail. Perhaps out of love and

concern for his little sister and her fate, Caulfield finally agrees to come home with her, which will mean mending fences with his father, and his secret fraternity.

## **Acceptance and commitment**

At the story's end Caulfield now has the ultimate knowledge, and at the same time he has resigned himself to his role and his place in life as a Freemason. He no longer wishes to "catch" the children; rather he is the 'fucker in the rye' who lets them fall. He is wearing his shooting hat and is presumably now "shooting the bull" (that is, Christianity) deliriously happy as he is soaked by falling rain. The horses on the merry go round symbolize the 'four horsemen' who ride at the Apocalypse. The "smoke in your eyes" is the smoke from Caulfield's symbolic rifle. (Or is it a real rifle? Caulfield's sanity and his grip on reality seem fragile; perhaps his report is a sugar coating of a real mass murder event.)

*"Maybe I will the next time. I'll watch ya," I said. "Got your ticket?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Go ahead, then—I'll be on this bench right over here. I'll watch ya." I went over and sat down on this bench, and she went and got on the carrousel. She walked all around it. I mean she walked once all the way around it. Then she sat down on this big, brown, beat-up-looking old horse. Then the carrousel started, and I watched her go around and around. There were only about five or six other kids on the ride, and the song the carrousel was playing was "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." It was playing it very jazzy and funny. All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them.*

*When the ride was over she got off her horse and came over to me. "You ride once, too, this time," she said.*

*"No, I'll just watch ya. I think I'll just watch," I said. I gave her some more of her dough. "Here. Get some more tickets."*

*She took the dough off me. "I'm not mad at you any more," she said.*

*"I know. Hurry up—the thing's gonna start again."*

*Then all of a sudden she gave me a kiss. Then she held her hand out, and said,*

*"It's raining. It's starting to rain." "I know."*

*Then what she did—it damn near killed me—she reached in my coat pocket and took out my red hunting hat and put it on my head.*

*"Don't you want it?" I said.*

*"You can wear it a while."*

*"Okay. Hurry up, though, now. You're gonna miss your ride. You won't get your own horse or anything."*

*She kept hanging around, though.*

*"Did you mean it what you said? You really aren't going away anywhere? Are you really going home afterwards?" she asked me.*

*"Yeah," I said. I meant it, too. I wasn't lying to her. I really did go home afterwards.*

*"Hurry up, now," I said. "The thing's starting."*

*She ran and bought her ticket and got back on the goddam carrousel just in time.*

*Then she walked all the way around it till she got her own horse back. Then she got on it. She waved to me and I waved back.*

*Boy, it began to rain like a bastard. In buckets, I swear to God. All the parents and mothers and everybody went over and stood right under the roof of the carrousel, so they wouldn't get soaked to the skin or anything, but I stuck around on the bench for quite a while. I got pretty soaking wet, especially my neck and my pants. My hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection, in a way; but I got soaked anyway. I didn't care, though. I felt so damn happy all of sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there.*

In closing, Caulfield reminds us (as he told us in the beginning) that he's been sent off to some sort of rehabilitation camp on the West Coast, where he is being subjected to psychoanalysis (or mind control), before he will go on for more schooling:

*That's all I'm going to tell about. I could probably tell you what I did after I went home, and how I got sick and all, and what school I'm supposed to go to next fall, after I get out of here, but I don't feel like it. I really don't. That stuff doesn't interest me too much right now.*

*A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I'm going apply myself when I go back to school next September. It's such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you do it? The answer is, you don't. I think I am, but how do I know? I swear it's a stupid question.*

*[...]*

*D.B. asked me what I thought about all this stuff I just finished telling you about. I didn't know what the hell to say. If you want to know the truth, I don't know what I think about it. I'm sorry I told so many people about it. About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I*

*told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It's funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.*

Salinger already indicated the fate that may be coming to Stradlater, Ackley, and Maurice. In a previous passage he used prefiguration typology to subtly indicate Caulfield's hostility towards them and the entire world. The passage shows Caulfield's schizophrenic combination of anger and fear, and at the end he expresses a genocidal desire to ride an atomic bomb – perhaps the inspiration for a similar scene in the Apocalyptic film *Dr. Strangelove*.

*He once told Allie and I that if he'd had to shoot anybody, he wouldn't've known which direction to shoot in. He said the Army was practically as full of bastards as the Nazis were. I remember Allie once asked him wasn't it sort of good that he was in the war because he was a writer and it gave him a lot to write about and all. He made Allie go get his baseball mitt and then he asked him who was the best war poet, Rupert Brooke or Emily Dickinson. Allie said Emily Dickinson. I don't know too much about it myself, because I don't read much poetry, but I do know it'd drive me crazy if I had to be in the Army and be with a bunch of guys like Ackley and Stradlater and old Maurice all the time, marching with them and all. I was in the Boy Scouts once, for about a week, and I couldn't even stand looking at the back of the guy's neck in front of me. They kept telling you to look at the back of the guy's neck in front of you. I swear if there's ever another war, they better just take me out and stick me in front of a firing squad. I wouldn't object. .. Anyway, I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will.*

The line “Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody” implies that high-level Freemason must maintain the order's secrets in strictest confidence or else they will start “missing everybody” – in other words be killed. This line was why the book was present at so many assassinations, to remind those who have sworn the oath to remain silent or be killed.

Salinger's warning repeats the one given by another Freemason, Mark Twain's, at the conclusion of Tom Sawyer

*“When are you going to start the gang and turn robbers?”*

*“Oh Right off. We'll get the boys together and have the initiation tonight.”*

*“Have the which?”*

*“Have the initiation.”*

*“What's that?”*

*“It's to swear to stand by one another and never tell the gang's secrets, even if you're chopped all to flinders, and kill anybody and all his family that hurts one of the gang.”*

Twain's warning is an example of how long and how far-ranging the Freemasons' control of culture and the political system has been. It seems to exert its pernicious influence over much of what we call democracy and popular culture — either alone, or as part of a many-tentacled system involving other equally secretive organizations. Hopefully the truth will come to light soon.

This needs to happen because as Salinger wrote:

*That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any. You may think there is, but once you get there, when you're not looking, somebody'll sneak up and write "Fuck you" right under your nose.*